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978-1-107-07408-8 - Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia: Antecedents of the Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia

Veljko Vujačić

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Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia

This book examines the role of Russian and Serbian nationalism in different modes of dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in 1991. Why did Russia's elites agree to the dissolution of the Soviet Union along the borders of Soviet republics, leaving twenty-five million Russians outside Russia? Conversely, why did Serbia's elite succeed in mobilizing Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia for the nationalist cause? Combining a Weberian emphasis on interpretive understanding and counterfactual analysis with theories of nationalism, Veljko Vujačić highlights the role of historical legacies, national myths, collective memories, and literary narratives in shaping diametrically opposed attitudes toward the state in Russia and Serbia. The emphasis on the unintended consequences of communist nationality policy highlights how these attitudes interacted with institutional factors, favoring different outcomes in 1991. The book's Postscript examines how this explanation holds up in the light of Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Veljko Vujačić is Associate Professor of Sociology at Oberlin College. His articles have appeared in *Theory and Society*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *East European Politics and Societies*, *Comparative Politics*, *Research in Political Sociology*, the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, the *Encyclopedia of Revolutions*, the *Concise Encyclopedia of Comparative Sociology*, and various edited volumes. Vujačić is the author of *The Sociology of Nationalism* (2013; in Serbian). He is the recipient of fellowships and grants from the Social Science Research Council, the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, IREX, and the Carnegie, Mellon, and Rockefeller Foundations. In 2010, he won the Teaching Excellence Award in the Social Science Division at Oberlin College.

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Union and Yugoslavia*

VELJKO VUJČIĆ

Oberlin College



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For Frieda and Danilo

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

When it is said that the state is the highest and ultimate principle in the world, this is entirely correct, provided that it is properly understood. The state is the highest organization of power in the world; it has power over life and death.... The antithesis and the error is that such discussions turn exclusively around the state and do not take the nation into account.

Max Weber

The twentieth century, panic-stricken in the face of nationalist and racist cravings, strains to fill up the chasm of time with production figures or the names of a few political-economic systems; meanwhile, it has renounced investigations of the fine tissue of becoming, where no thread should be overlooked – even the ideas of forgotten Russian sects. What apparently disappears forever is, in fact, imperceptibly transformed.

Czeslaw Milosz

The common people remember and tell of what they are able to grasp and what they are able to transform into legend.

Ivo Andrić

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Veljko Vujčić

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page ix
<i>A Note on Transliteration</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
1 Russians and Serbs in the Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia: Grounds for Comparison and Alternative Explanations	10
I. <i>Communist Nationality Policy in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia</i>	10
II. <i>Contentious Events, Political Processes, and the Puzzle of Different Outcomes</i>	15
III. <i>Explanations of Different Outcomes in Russia and Serbia</i>	25
IV. <i>Methodological Considerations</i>	39
2 States, Nations, and Nationalism: A Weberian View	50
I. <i>Max Weber on Nations, Nationalism, and Imperialism</i>	50
II. <i>Ethnic Mythomoteurs and the Emotional Appeal of Nationalism</i>	65
III. <i>Relative Backwardness, Intellectual Mobilization, and Ressentiment: The Diffusion of Nationalism from Pioneer to Follower Societies</i>	75
IV. <i>Civic, Ethnic, and State Definitions of the Nation</i>	85
Conclusion	94
3 Empire, State, and Nation in Russia and Serbia	96
Part I. <i>Rossiiā or Holy Rus'?: State and Nation in Imperial Russia</i>	97
I. <i>Imperial Patrimonialism and the Image of Dual Russia</i>	97
II. <i>Nationalism against the State: From Holy Russia to Narod</i>	106
III. <i>Imperial, Ethnic, and Civic Nationalism: Three Responses to the State-Society Gulf in Late Imperial Russia</i>	116
Part II. <i>Serbia: Nation-Building as Heroic Epos</i>	123
I. <i>Serbs in the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires</i>	123
	vii

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-07408-8 - Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia: Antecedents of the
Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia

Veljko Vujačić

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Contents

II. <i>The Story of Kosovo: The Emergence of the Serbian National Myth</i>	130
III. <i>Prince or People? Relative Backwardness, Intellectual Mobilization, and the Cult of the People among Liberals, Socialists, and Populists</i>	138
IV. <i>Precious Martyrs on the Altar of Church and Nation: The Apogee of Nation-Building in Serbia</i>	150
<i>Conclusion: Comparing Legacies of State- and Nation-Building in Russia and Serbia</i>	154
4 Communism and Nationalism: Russians and Serbs in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia	159
<i>Part I. From Bolshevik Rus' to Sovetskaia Rossiia</i>	160
I. <i>The October Revolution and Russian Nationalism</i>	160
II. <i>Leninist Nationalist Policy: The Struggle against Great Russian Chauvinism</i>	170
III. <i>Proletarian against Peasant: Socialism in One Country and the Birth of Soviet-Russian Identity</i>	175
IV. <i>Stalin's Soviet-Russian Autocracy and the Great Patriotic War</i>	185
V. <i>The Stalinist Legacy and the Russian Nation</i>	194
<i>Part II. Between Nation and State: Serbia and Serbs in the Yugoslav State</i>	197
I. <i>Serbia, Croatia, and Yugoslavism Prior to Unification</i>	197
II. <i>Serbs and Serbia in Interwar Yugoslavia</i>	203
III. <i>Ethnic Nationalism in the Yugoslav Civil War</i>	214
IV. <i>Partisan Heroes on the Altar of the Fatherland: From the Attack on Great Serbian Hegemony to the Re-creation of a National Myth</i>	221
V. <i>Communist Federalism and the Serbian National Question</i>	235
5 The Nation as a Community of Shared Memories and Common Political Destiny: Russians and Serbs in Literary Narratives	243
I. <i>The Thaw in Russian Literature: Nation and Individual as Victims of the State</i>	245
II. <i>The Futility of Collective Sacrifice? Serbs as Victims of Yugoslavist Illusions</i>	263
Conclusion	282
Postscript	298
<i>Appendix Tables</i>	311
<i>Index</i>	315

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-07408-8 - Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia: Antecedents of the
Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia

Veljko Vujčić

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

This book has taken many more years to complete than I initially expected. In the process of researching and writing it I have accumulated so many debts that even remembering them all presents a challenge. My first tribute goes to those who are no longer with us. Aljoša Mimica of Belgrade University was my first sociology professor. An impressive lecturer, outstanding translator, and lifelong Durkheim scholar, Mimica was a European humanist in the best sense of that term. He imparted to me a lasting love for the sociological classics, and I can only hope that some of that appreciation will be obvious to the reader of this book. Victor Zaslavsky was *the* pioneering sociologist of Soviet-type societies, a term that, to my knowledge at least, he invented. As will become obvious in due course, his work on the unintended consequences of Soviet nationality policy changed my views on the Yugoslav national question as well. But, as everyone who knew Victor will recognize, he was, above all, a great Russian Jewish *intelligent* whose interests and occupational experiences spanned a vast array of fields, from engineering to art, sociology, and literature. I learned a tremendous amount from him, but it is his humor, warmth, and kindness – his “good Russian uncle” personality – that I will always cherish and remember.

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Veljko Vujčić

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

from the relative backwardness perspective is indebted to him, even if my focus on ideas is different from his preoccupation with the effects of geopolitics and international political economy on domestic politics. Ken Jowitt's influence lurks in the background of much of this book. He is responsible for making me aware that being an insider is a limited intellectual privilege. His lectures and writings on comparative communism threw a completely new light on a phenomenon that I thought I understood well enough as a native, but that, thanks to his insights, appeared both more unfamiliar and more brightly illuminated as time went on. Leon Kojen of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade has been a lifelong intellectual mentor. His analytical clarity, intellectual precision, and knowledge of many fields – from philosophy to literature, history, and the sociological classics – combine into a model of intellectual excellence that is hard to follow. His comments on virtually all chapters of this book have made it into a much better work than it would have been otherwise.

In addition to my mentors and intellectual models, many other individuals have supported my scholarly endeavors over the years. Tomek Grabowski stands out among them, not only as a passionate and conscientious reader of my work, but also as an intellectual companion in life's journey. I am grateful to him beyond words. Andrej Milivojević has read all of my work many times over. A historian by training and intellectual vocation, he noticed many flaws early on and helped me correct them. He was also instrumental in helping me collect sources and compile the tables for this book. I cherish my friendship with him dearly. Marc Garcelon has been a long-standing intellectual companion, fellow sociologist, and friend. I greatly profited from his many insights in ways that may not always be obvious to him. Rogers Brubaker, Vladimir Tismaneanu, and Jeffrey Kopstein supported me in different ways, whether by commenting on my work in progress or by writing endless grant recommendations, regardless of whether there was a realistic chance of success or not. I can only hope that this book meets their high expectations and represents a partial reward for their kindness and effort.

A little step into my “native realm” – to borrow from the title of one of Czesław Miłosz's books – is now in order. In my hometown, Belgrade, where I made my first intellectual steps, conversations with Slobodan Naumović, Milan Subotić, and Borislav Radović have been a source of inspiration over several decades. The same can be said of my many interesting exchanges with Branko Milanović, who, though a longtime resident in the United States, is intellectually and emotionally still deeply steeped in “our part” of the world. He is not only an outstanding economist but also a connoisseur and practitioner of good writing, and thus a strident critic of bad prose. His warm understanding for my faults was matched only by his hospitality and friendship on more occasions than I can recall.

My understanding of Russia was greatly enhanced by my contacts and friendship with many individuals, both in Russia and outside it. Among those from Russia who left the most lasting impact are Oleg Kharkhordin, Elena

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Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia

Veljko Vujačić

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

xi

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Many institutions have supported my work over the years. The Department of Sociology at Oberlin College has provided a congenial and friendly environment, the very opposite of the high-strung atmosphere of many a research university. "Far from the madding crowd" I was allowed to think and develop, and I am grateful to my department colleagues and staff for that. Oberlin College deserves special thanks for supporting my research with several leaves of absence and internal grants that allowed for more semesters off and summer research abroad. Without that kind of help I would never have been in a position to delve deeper into Russian and Yugoslav history. At different stages, research for this book was supported by the Social Science Research Council, the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., the Andrew Mellon Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. This last institution is responsible for a blissful month in Bellagio, Italy, where I pondered the meaning of Weber's writings on nationalism in the serene atmosphere of Lake Como. To all these institutions I am deeply grateful. In concluding, I wish to express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript whose comments were instrumental in helping me improve the book as well to two editors at Cambridge University Press, Lewis Bateman and Shaun Vigil, for their guidance and patience.

Several chapters of this book draw on or reproduce materials that previously appeared in article form. Part of Chapter 1 draws on "Perceptions of the State in Russia and Serbia: The Role of Ideas in the Soviet and Yugoslav Collapse," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 20, 2 (April–June 2004): 164–194. Part of the section on Stalinism in Chapter 4 is reproduced from "Stalinism and Russian Nationalism: A Reconceptualization," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 23, 2 (April–June 2007): 156–183. Both articles are available at the publisher Web site of Taylor & Francis: www.tandfonline.com. Parts of Chapter 2 that deal with Weber's theory of the nation first appeared in "Historical Legacies, Nationalist Mobilization and Political Outcomes in Russia and Serbia: A Weberian

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Veljko Vujčić

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

View,” *Theory and Society*, 25, 6 (December 1996): 763–801. Finally, the section on Solzhenitsyn and Grossman in Chapter 4 first appeared in Italian as “Aleksandr Solženicyyn e Vasilij Grossman: Uno slavophilo e un occidentalista contro lo stato totalitario Sovietico,” in Tommaso Piffer and Vladimir Zubok, eds., *Società totalitarie e transizione alla democrazia. Saggi in memoria di Victor Zaslavsky* (Rome: Il Mulino, 2011), pp. 375–411. I would like to thank the publishers for allowing me to reproduce material from these articles here.

It has become a custom for authors to say something about their most loved ones, and there is every reason to engage in this honorable ritual here. My wife, Frieda, and son, Danilo, have been a joy and great support for many years, and I am grateful to them beyond words. They were both patient listeners, though with my son I shared readings of a different (more exciting!) kind. Frieda absorbed endless renditions of the book’s argument with remarkable stamina and ever-renewed curiosity. She also undertook the heroic task of composing the Index. To devote this book to Frieda and Danilo is truly the least I can do for them.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

A Note on Transliteration

I have kept to the standard transliteration from Russian but have deviated from it in the case of names that are well known to the English-speaking reader: thus Dostoevsky rather than Dostoevskii, Tolstoy rather than Tolstoi, and Yeltsin rather than El'tsin. Serbian names have been kept in their original form. The following short glossary can serve as a guide to the pronunciation of unfamiliar letters:

č is like “ch” in chat
ć is like “tj” in tune
dj or đ is like “j” in Jack
dž is like “g” in giant
j is like “y” in yard
lj is like “liyuh” (middle sound) in “million”
nj is like “ny” in “canyon”
š is “sh” in “shut”
ž is like the “zh” sound in “treasure”